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## Opinion

### Exxon's science Attack on government research was unfounded

*(Published: October 8, 2002)*

In January of this year, Exxon-funded researcher David Page all but accused a government researcher of fraud when he estimated how much oil from the Exxon Valdez spill is still in Prince William Sound.

National Marine Fisheries Service research chemist Jeffrey Short reported that he had found, 12 years after the spill, a lot more oil than anticipated. His research showed the amount of oil left was about 200 times as much as estimated by Exxon's contractor.

Professor Page, the Exxon researcher, responded by attacking Mr. Short's research ethics. "We saw no evidence that Short dug 7,000 pits on 91 locations. . . Had thousands been dug, we would have located many more." Professor Page accused Mr. Short of subjectively choosing "worst-case locations," indicating a "strong bias" that "raises questions about the scientific validity" of his conclusions.

The source of Mr. Short's funding, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, responded by seeking an independent review of Mr. Short's work. The Council asked both the National Academy of Sciences and the Society of

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**Compass**
**By Walter B. Parker**

*(Published: October 8, 2002)*  
State Commissioner of Natural Resources Pat Pourchot and U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton have declared that a citizen oversight group for the trans-Alaska oil pipeline is unnecessary.

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National Academy of Sciences and the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry to investigate, but they do not consider allegations of research misconduct. Instead, the Exxon Trustees commissioned a review by a National Marine Fisheries Service panel with no supervisory responsibility for the Alaska lab where Mr. Short works.

That review vindicated Mr. Short. His study was "rigorous, well-designed and executed." The records for all stages of the work were "excellent." There were a handful of minor record-keeping discrepancies, but the number was "not unusual in a project of this magnitude."

If there was any bias in the way Mr. Short selected his sampling sites, the review said, he left out sites that were more likely to show oil. Leaving out those sites led Mr. Short to make a lower, more conservative estimate of how much oil was remaining.

The reviewers validated Mr. Short's essential conclusion. "Either previous (1989-1993) estimates of oil volume were low or the Exxon Valdez oil is more persistent than previously thought."

Those findings might disagree with those of previous studies, but that doesn't mean Mr. Short's methods were suspect. Different studies use different approaches. "Any comparisons made between this study and other studies conducted with different protocols," the reviewers said, "should be made cautiously."

The question raised by Mr. Short's work is whether parts of the Sound that were most heavily affected by the spill have recovered yet. Mr. Short says his findings suggest those heavily oiled areas have not fully recovered.

A reasonable person might disagree with Mr. Short's conclusions, as professor Page does. But it's not reasonable to impugn the scientific integrity of Mr. Short's work.

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**Fred Machetanz****Alaska says farewell to a beloved painter**

It's a long way from Ohio State to Unalakleet, a long way from the Midwest to the Matanuska Valley. Artist Fred Machetanz made the trip a memorable one and recorded a vision of Alaska that will outlive the man who put it on blue canvas.

Mr. Machetanz's vision of the North was distinctly romantic, one that captured the hearts of countless admirers in Alaska and throughout the world. With his wife, Sara, he built a home by hand outside Palmer and supported a good life there with his art, illustrations and children's stories. His work was always in demand, graced homes and lobbies, the covers of Iditarod annuals and magazines.

He appeared to have a steady vision of an Alaska most of

us see only in moments. His was the Alaska of northern lights and lamp glow. Hard edges softened. Mr. Machetanz knew Alaska isn't a soft place; the same hands that knew brush and canvas knew hammer and nail. But he never seemed to lose sight of the light he found.

Not all Alaskans find it. And even those who do often don't see it for long. Mr. Machetanz did.

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### Alaska Fiscal Dilemma

Here is the 12th question and answer in our "Candidates' Entrance Exam" on Alaska's fiscal picture.

**Q:** What is the average production (barrels per day) from North Slope oil fields other than Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk?

**A:** The 21 other fields averaged 16,200 barrels per day per field in fiscal year 2002. That means the average new field is 2.4 percent the size of the giant fields at Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk. Omitting two tiny North Slope fields, a more representative average production for each new field would be 17,900 barrels a day. That is still just 2.7 percent as much as Prudhoe and Kuparuk.

Not only do these new fields produce much less oil, but they also pay a significantly lower severance tax rate. Through a formula called the economic limit factor, the severance tax rate declines as fields become smaller and less profitable.



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